http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/s-african-citrus-farmers-investment-paying-off-as-eu-exports-rise-2016-01-25

S African citrus farmers' investment paying off as EU exports rise

PUBLISHED 25 JAN 16 BY: ANINE KILIAN - CREAMER MEDIA SENIOR STAFF WRITER


Laeveld Sitrus

Three years of intense collaboration between the European Union (EU) and the Citrus Growers Association of Southern Africa (CGA) resulted in record South African citrus exports in 2015.

Given that the EU is the biggest export market for South African citrus, the domestic industry continues to invest in measures to ensure the fruit it exports to the EU is free from citrus black spot (CBS).

Citrus exports to the EU had grown at a rate of 22% from January to November 2015. In volume, exports to the EU accounted for 40% of total citrus exports (30% oranges, 66% mandarins, 24% lemons), up from 36% in the prior season.

"This season has by far surpassed everyone's expectations. I understand that some 100 000 workers operate during the picking season so it is easy to estimate the impact of such exports on jobs creation," said EU Embassy spokesperson **Frank Oberholzer**.

CGA CEO **Justin Chadwick,** meanwhile**,** told *Engineering News Online* during a recent tour of the Laeveld Sitrus farm, in Limpopo, that "every year, the regulations and requirements have increased and resources have been stretched to ensure farmers comply with these regulations,"

He noted that the citrus industry had, together with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, developed a risk management system – involving many steps – to ensure South African-grown citrus fruit complied with EU regulation and was free of CBS.

"It starts with the registration of orchards and includes many different inspection and spraying processes, as well as an early-detection process where we dip the fruit into a chemical to induce CBS so we can pick up any latent infections," Chadwick explained.

He pointed out that, in 2015, only 15 interceptions of CBS had been found, compared with 28 in 2014 and 35 in 2013.

The risk management system was, however, "complex" and required significant investment of additional resources by farmers.

"It takes a lot of time and money to meet the EU legislative requirements and to ensure the fruit is inspected on time. Farmers have had to put in additional resources, equipment and people to ensure they meet these requirements," Chadwick said, noting that it cost the industry about R1-billion a year to meet the requirements.

"The industry earns R10-billion a year, so 10% is going towards meeting the regulations."

Despite the high cost, South African farmers were expected to see additional benefits beyond the higher citrus exports.

"My interaction with local citrus farmers has shown that the overall systemic approach to quality management that they have implemented will benefit them on many other levels.

"By putting a system in place that allows them to comply with the EU's regulations as the main destination of South African fruit, has made room for predictability and a growing market towards Europe," said EU head of delegation to South Africa Ambassador **Marcus Cornaro**.

He added that there was a lot of potential for South African exports to the EU to grow, especially in agroprocessing, such as South African produced juices.

Oberholzer added that it would not be off the mark to say that the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement initiated in 2014 provided an opportunity for South Africa to further strengthen its access to the EU market, notably in the agrofood sector.

+27 (0)11 622 3744
+27 (0)11 622 9350
newsdesk@engineeringnews.co.za
http://www.engineeringnews.co.za